

CHALMA AND TEPOZTECATL: FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM IN CENTRAL MEXICO

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In my book on Tlayacapan, a Spanish-speaking community in northern Morelos, I found folk Catholicism informing many spheres of village life (Ingham 1986). Positive social relations were reinforced by godparenthood and *fiestas* for the saints whereas negative relations were blamed on egoism and the influence of the Devil. Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints exemplified moral and social virtues; the Devil and his minions represented dangerous Others.

In all this it seemed that reproduction and family were practical concerns and organizing metaphors. The villagers valued children, and parenthood was the quintessential expression of adulthood. Godparenthood and *fiestas* were forms of ritual kinship. Carnival, bull riding, and other invocations of the profane reaffirmed the value of physical strength and natural reproduction. The forces of evil, meanwhile, threatened and mocked reproduction, the family, and positive sociality. Supernatural afflictions caused by harmful spirits were couched as demonic transformations of natural and spiritual reproduction, and the Devil, harmful spirits, and witches posed special dangers to infants and children.

These themes of reproduction and kinship seemed to me to be essentially Christian. They involved the orthodox distinction between natural reproduction and spiritual regeneration and a Christian understanding of the role of the Devil in a fallen world. Godparenthood and the *fiesta* system had European origins. To be sure, there were traces of pre-Hispanic belief and practice but they tended to express Christian categories (*i.e.*, the profane, the Adamic, the demonic) and thus, generally speaking, they complemented rather than contradicted the Catholicism of

local culture.

In this paper I elaborate this view of folk culture in central Mexico with discussions of the pilgrimage sanctuary at Chalma and the legend and festival of Tepoztecatl. These two ceremonial complexes, rich in religious symbolism and meaning, again show the centrality of the reproductive metaphor in Mexican folk culture but, in addition, they exemplify something that I all but ignored in my earlier publication, that is, the way in which the metaphor encompasses images of the mother-son relationship and issues of guilt, shame, and redemption. My aim here is to call attention to expressions of these subjective yet characteristic features of Catholicism in Mexican folk culture.

Chalma is the third most popular pilgrimage center in Mexico; known for its images of the crucified Christ and Saint Michael the Archangel, year after year it draws thousands of *mestizo* and Indian visitors from many areas of the central highlands. Tepoztecatl was once the patron deity of Tepoztlan, a Nahuatl- and Spanish-speaking community in northern Morelos. In pre-Conquest times, pilgrims came to Tepoztlan from distant parts of Mexico to visit the altar of Tepoztecatl (Redfield 1930:28); even now Tepoztecatl's fame extends beyond Tepoztlan. Evidently, the religious complexes at Chalma and Tepoztlan express important themes in Mexican folk Catholicism. They also have an indigenous coloring, which might seem to imply that the themes in question are more pre-Hispanic than European. Yet, on closer examination the Chalma and Tepoztecatl complexes reveal the underlying Catholicism of Indian and *mestizo* religion in central Mexico. In order to fully appreciate this Catholicism, however, we must know what we are looking for. Let us begin, then, with a consideration of the Christian symbolic order as such, that is, the system of symbolic oppositions and similarities between the biblical scenes of Eden and Golgotha. Both the well-known features of the system and its less familiar subtleties are germane to the discussion. The subtleties include the psychological nuances of original sin and the symbolism of trees and the cross.

Original sin and the Crucifixion

Nature and spirit are opposing or contrasting elements. Adam and Eve, the first parents, personify nature. Their sin has connotations of illicit sexuality and disobedience. It also hints of incest. Christ and Mary, meanwhile, represent spiritual regeneration. They redeem humanity from the sin of Adam and Eve while reproducing their relationship on a higher plane.

In making this interpretation, I refer to Catholic liturgy, Saint Augustine, medieval Christian art, old Christian legends and stories, and Gnostic scriptures. Although they are now deemed heretical by the church, Gnostic scriptures record understandings that were possible in the early days of Christianity and may still lurk at the edge of canonical readings. I also draw on psychoanalytic studies insofar as they find oedipal meanings in the Fall and Crucifixion (1).

After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness, and Eve was punished by increased pain in childbirth. The implication seems to be that original sin entails sexuality and, in fact, this has been the usual understanding. Augustine, influential on this point, attributed the transmission of original sin to sexual intercourse (see Pagels 1988; Phillips 1984). The traditional rites of blessing the baptismal font on Holy Saturday and baptism also imply that sexuality figured in the Fall. In the rite on Holy Saturday, the font is likened to a womb; the Paschal candle and Holy Spirit, meanwhile, seem to represent the paternal principle. In contrast to sexual intercourse, which reproduces original sin, baptism commemorates the death and resurrection of Christ, cleanses original and actual sin, and regenerates the person as a spiritual being.

Clearly, the meaning of original sin involves the tree or trees at the center of the garden of Eden. It appears that the tree of knowledge and the tree of life are facets of a single image. Both trees were in the middle of the garden, and both bore forbidden fruit. In an old Christian legend, Seth returns to Paradise for the oil of mercy and sees the tree in two forms: initially without bark or leaves and embraced by a skinless serpent, and

then with bark and leaves and with a baby, God's son, wrapped in swaddling clothes in the upper branches (Morris 1871:xiii).

The Seth legend and scripture imply that the tree had paternal and maternal qualities. An angel gives Seth three apple seeds that he was to put under Adam's tongue after Adam died. From the three kernels, three trees would grow - a cedar, a cypress, and pine. The three would represent the Trinity: the cedar, the Father; the cypress, the Son; and the pine, a fruit-giving tree, the Holy Ghost. In the time of David the three wands grow into one tree. Later it becomes the tree of the cross (Morris 1871: xiii-xv). Passages in the Bible link the Holy Ghost with wisdom and truth (*Acts* 6, 3; *John* 14, 16-17; 15, 26), and other passages connect Wisdom (Sophia) a feminine figure, with trees. *Ecclesiasticus* 24 identifies Wisdom with a cedar on Lebanon, a cypress on Mount Hermon, a palm in Engedi, the rose bushes of Jericho, a "fine olive" in the plain, and a plane tree (see Watts 1960:103-104). Wisdom is also associated with the tree in the garden, at least implicitly; the tree embodied knowledge of good and evil, and Wisdom - Sophia - has knowledge (*Wisdom* 8). A passage in *Ecclesiasticus* 37, 17-25 about Wisdom describes thoughts in a way that parallels the tree of knowledge in Eden. «Thoughts», it says, «are rooted in the heart, and this sends out four branches: good and evil, life and death»; and it adds that understanding produces «fruits». The fruits of understanding recall the fruit of the tree of knowledge. During the time of Creation, Wisdom was by God's side, «delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence» (*Proverbs* 8, 30-31). Wisdom, in other words, was God's partner. The Seth legend, moreover, implies that she was mother to God's child and perhaps to the serpent. Eating the fruit of the tree, then, has connotations of transgression against the mother as well as the father.

In Christian art the serpent sometimes has the head of a woman (Phillips 1984:61-62). The name "Eve" in cognate Aramaic and Arabic languages means "snake-woman" (*ibidem*: 41). Adam took fruit from Eve, just as Eve took fruit from the tree or the serpent. The significance may be that the tree and serpent were manifestations of Eve in her relationship with Adam. Snakes were associated with "wisdom" or magic in the religions of the Near East (*ibidem*: 41), and the name "Eve" may involve

a pun meaning "lady of Life," suggesting a connection with the tree of life (*ibidem*: 28). Eve is the «mother of all those who live» (*Genesis* 3, 20), which implies that she was Adam's mother and that somehow she was part of the spirit of the tree. A gnostic text, *The reality of the rulers*, states that Eve is Adam's mother, and it says that before the fall, the spirit of Eve became the tree when "authorities" tried to rape her and that her spirit then appeared as the serpent, speaking to Adam and the carnal Eve (Bentley 1987:70, 71). In the gnostic poem, *Thunder-perfect intellect*, Eve is Wisdom and mother, daughter, and sister to her husband (Bentley 1987:80).

Mary, the Second Eve, also has affinities with the tree and Wisdom. In medieval paintings and stained glass Mary is part of a tree that grows from a recumbent Jesse. The Lesson at Mass in the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin is *Ecclesiasticus* 24, the passage that identifies Wisdom with trees. Christian legend traces the cross to the tree of life in Eden. Mary, then, is connected with the tree in the garden and the tree of the cross through her association with Wisdom. A touching variant of this sympathetic relation between Mary and the cross occurs in an Old English lament. Mary accuses the cross of being an unkind tree, her son's "stepmother". The cross replies that she owes Mary the honor of bearing the fruit that blossomed in "her" branches. Finally, Mary and the cross express their unity as Mary kisses the cross (Morris 1871:131-149; quoted in Jung 1956:270-271).

While Eve is paired with Adam, Mary is paired with Christ, the New Adam: as representative and personification of the church, Mary is the New Eve and bride of Christ; and where Eve is the natural mother of human beings, Mary is their spiritual mother and the "mother" of God. In Catholic liturgy, *The song of songs*, a Hebrew love-poem, is a dialogue between Christ and his bride the church and a source of symbols for the Blessed Virgin (Watts 1960: 105). Thus Christ mounted on the cross portrays a marital union. Augustine wrote:

«Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from his chamber; he went out with a presage of his nuptials into the field of the world... He came to the marriage-bed of the cross, and there, in mounting it, he

consummated his marriage. And when he perceived the sighs of the creature, he lovingly gave himself up to the torment in place of his bride, and he joined himself to the woman for ever» (Augustine 1865; quoted in Jung 1956: 269) (2).

The woman here refers to the church but also, perhaps, to Mary inasmuch as she represents and personifies the church.

Chalma

The sanctuary of the Lord of Chalma lies in a canyon some seventy miles southwest of Mexico City. Along with the crucifix and the image of Saint Michael in the sanctuary, significant features of the ritual field include: a cave containing crosses and images of Saint Mary of Egypt and Saint Michael; an *ahuehuete* (bald cypress) tree growing next to a spring and an adjacent altar for the Virgin; and many crosses in nearby caves and on surrounding mountainsides. Pilgrims arrive on January 6 from the state of Mexico; on February 2 from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; on the first Friday in Lent from Morelos, Guerrero, Tlaxcala, and Puebla; and on Pentecost from the Valley of Mexico. Visiting groups of *fiesta* sponsors may bring the images of their saints to the sanctuary to honor the Lord of Chalma and to seek his blessing (Toor 1947; Hobgood 1971; Turner & Turner 1978).

Life, fertility, and sexual sin are prominent themes in the activities and folklore of Chalma. The Lord of Chalma gives and restores life. The waters of the river at Chalma and the spring at the *ahuehuete* tree wash away sins, cure the sick, and restore fertility (Hobgood 1971:262; Toor 1947:181). Doña Luz Jiménez of Milpa Alta says «crying out» to the Lord of Chalma saved her ailing mother (Horcasitas 1972: 59-61). Men leave their hats at the *ahuehuete* tree while women dance and leave their braids or small bags containing the umbilical cords of infants (*ibidem*: 63). Pilgrims who arrive by way of Malinalco may place umbilical cords on several crosses on a small pyramid instead. The practice ensures that the boys whose umbilical cords are so offered

will be healthy and virile (Hobgood 1971: 255). The *ahuehuete* tree and the crosses are evidently analogous.

Doña Luz mentions a married man, a father, who went to Chalma with a widow. Because they sinned, they were turned into trees (the *ahuehuete*), each embracing the other (Horcasitas 1972: 63). Other pilgrims, it seems, have been turned to stone as punishment for sins of the flesh committed on the way to Chalma (Hobgood 1971: 263). An informant in Tlayacapan said that two rocks leaning against each other on the trail to Chalma are the remains of a *comadre* and *compadre* who broke the taboo on sexual relations between *comadres* and *compadres*. A woman told Toor (1947: 182) that a priest and his maid servant were imprisoned in stones for sleeping on the same *petate* while en route to Chalma.

Symbolic references to fertility and economic vitality characterize ritual activities at Chalma. The references appear in the presence of the *Concheros* and their use of the cross, which to them represents the cross of Christ and the tree of life (Verastique 1984), and in the processions of the *fiesta* sponsors. A procession of pilgrims from San Pedro Tultepec described by Benuzzi (1981), for example, included children, mothers, couples engaged to be married, and images of the Christ Child. A man carried a maydaylike pole, while young women dressed as shepherdesses held the ends of the radiating colored bands. Many pilgrims carried reeds, an important crop in the traditional mat- and basket-making economy of San Pedro.

Interpretation

According to the tradition of Chalma, the image of the crucified Christ miraculously replaced the pre-Hispanic god of the cave in 1539, a few years after the arrival of Augustinian friars. The pre-Hispanic god, the focus of pilgrimages from a wide region, was offered incense and vases containing «hearts and blood taken from innocent children» (Sardo 1810: 3-4).

Since the cave-dwelling jaguar deity was associated with Tezcatlipoca in Aztec religion, Romero (1957) surmised that the cave god was Tezcatlipoca. Benuzzi (1981: 31, 35), noting that

contemporary Indians say that the cave god was catlike, agrees, although he thinks it possible that the rain god Tlaloc was worshipped at Chalma. In my view, it is quite likely that Tlaloc was the god of the cave. Children were sacrificed to the rain deities (Durán 1967: 81-93), and Tlaloc was associated with caves. Durán (1967: 81) says that his name means «path under the earth or long cave» (see Sahagún 1956, I: 161; Sullivan 1874). Tlaloc, particularly in his guise as god of the underworld and in his associations with the night sun, was also affiliated with the jaguar in ancient Mexico (Klein 1980). The cult at Chalma, moreover, resembles the *granicero* or weather-working cults in northern Morelos and the area around Amecameca in the State of Mexico. These cults, which center on the cave of Alcala on the side of the great volcano Popocatepetl, focus on rain spirits, crosses, and the Blessed Virgin (see Bonfil Batalla 1968; Ingham 1986). Since the *graniceros* say that Saint Michael the Archangel is their guide and a leader of the rain spirits, the presence of Saint Michael at Chalma also suggests that Chalma is related to the cave-centered rain cults near Alcala (3).

An altar with crosses near the *ahuehuete* tree is dedicated to the Virgin (Benuzzi 1981: 93-95). One possible pre-Hispanic precursor of the Virgin is Chalchiuhtlicue, the goddess of water and the female counterpart of Tlaloc. Chalchiuhtlicue, like the Virgin of Guadalupe, wore a blue dress (Sahagún 1956, I: 51), and her water was thought to purify sin and to aid in the growth of maize. Springs near *ahuehuete* trees were particularly powerful in this regard (Durán 1967: 171-173). Another precursor may have been the goddess variously known as Chicomecoatl, Chalchiuhcihuatl, and Xilonen. Apparently related to Chalchiuhtlicue, her hymn puts her home in Tlalocan, place of the rain deities (Sahagún 1956, I: 51; IV: 304). As Chicomecoatl, she was responsible for want and famine; as Chalchiuhcihuatl, she was a source of abundance (Durán 1967: 135-136). Like Chalchiuhtlicue, she represented purity. Durán (1967: 266) explains that Xilonen was like a tender ear of corn, a maiden without sin, and that Chicomecoatl (Seven Snake) had prevailed against seven sins. He also says the «offerings of strings of ears of maize and flowers» on the day of the birth of the Virgin Mary were a survival from festivities honoring the goddesses Atlatonan, Chicomecoatl, and Toci (Durán 1967:141).

The similarity between the *ahuehuete* and crosses noted earlier, in combination with the associations between the Virgin and the *ahuehuete*, imply an affinity between the Virgin and the cross in Mexican folk culture. Olivera (1979) notes the parallels between the celebration of the Cross of May in San Nicolas Citlala in Guerrero and the pre-Hispanic cult of Chicomecoatl. The Santa Cruz in Citlala is a "goddess" who gives sustenance to the people and talks with the supernatural owner of rain. The cross is called the "Santísima Virgen" and is painted blue to represent water. This connection between cross and Virgen also occurs in northern Morelos. The *graniceros* there link the Virgen in prayers and ritual with crosses, trees, and rain.

Although Olivera thinks the Virgen's associations with the cross and rain are pre-Hispanic, it seems more likely that the Virgen acquired associations with water and fertility goddesses in New Spain in keeping with her pre-existing European associations with the cross and rain (4). The Virgen's connection with the *ahuehuete* tree, then, may reflect her assimilation of Chalchiuhtlicue and Chicomecoatl and her European associations with the cross or tree of life. Informants reported to Hobgood (1971: 262) that the Lord of Chalma first appeared next to the *ahuehuete* tree. The priests, they said, keep the real Lord of Chalma locked in a secret cellar under the altar; otherwise, they explained, «he would return to the tree». Evidently, the relation between the Lord of Chalma and the *ahuehuete* is analogous to the relation between Christ and the cross or Mary.

Yet the *ahuehuete* tree relates to the tree in the garden as well as the tree of the cross. Like the four rivers that branch out from the garden of Eden, a spring issues from the foot of the *ahuehuete* tree. The tree, embodying the remains of a married man and widow who sinned, alludes, along with the remains of other enchanted sinners, to original sin.

Hobgood (1971: 256) suggests that crosses replaced representations of Tlaloc at Chalma and, for that matter, throughout sixteenth-century Mexico. In support of his reconstruction, I would note that Tlaloc was identified with trees in pre-Hispanic religion. In the feast of Huey Tozoztli an artificial forest and large tree were placed in the courtyard in front of Tlaloc, thereby signifying that he was the "god of woods, forests, and waters". The tree, called Tota or "Father", was connected to

four other trees by cords, as if it were their father. The cords were decorated with tassels made of grass and were said to represent «the penance and harshness of the life led by those who served the gods» (Durán 1967:81-93).

The tassels in the ritual forest of Huey Tozoztli may be the pre-Hispanic antecedents of the present practice of hanging umbilical cords, hats, braids, and other objects on crosses and on the *ahuehuete* tree. Various beliefs and practices suggest that the offerings to the tree are penances for sins, especially sins involving sexuality. In San Francisco Tecospa and Tlayacapan, villagers use water boiled with an umbilical cord to treat infants and children whose eyes have been harmed by *aire de basura* (garbage air), air that emanates from prostitutes or women who have been engaging in sexual intercourse (Madsen 1960: 191). In Tlayacapan, in men's humor *sombreros* are phallic metaphors; and various beliefs and practices imply that women's hair is charged with libidinal energy. The underlying idea may be that umbilical cords, braids, and hats absorb and convey libidinal sin. Doña Luz explained that «one left all one's weariness under the trees» (Horcasitas 1972:63). It is said, too, that one should dance with a partner of the opposite sex at the *ahuehuete*. By dancing together and washing in the spring, the dance partners become *comadre* and *compadre* to each other (Hobgood 1971:263). In other words, they transform a natural into a spiritual relationship.

This moment of transformation from nature to spirit is also represented in the cave at Chalma (below the sanctuary) where the crucifix first appeared; the cave contains crosses and an image of Saint Mary of Egypt. The cross can represent the pagan tree of life and the tree of the cross. Saint Mary of Egypt was a prostitute in Alexandria. While seeking adventure on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, she approached the church with the crowd but was held back by a mysterious force. Standing near an image of the Virgin Mary in the courtyard, she promised to abandon her evil ways if she could enter the church. Upon entering the church she kissed the relic of the cross; later she lived a life of solitary penance beyond the Jordan (Carter 1967: 387).

The images of the Lord of Chalma and Saint Michael also represent concerns with fertility and redemption. Christ is a life-

giving figure and Saint Michael is associated with rain, which gives life. The trek from the *ahuehuete* tree toward the sanctuary by pilgrims can be construed as moving from Eden toward Golgotha while identifying with Christ. Pilgrims place flower crowns on their heads as they leave the *ahuehuete* for the sanctuary. And it is said that the image of Christ on display is a pilgrim (Toor 1947: 181-182).

Tepoztecatl

Tepoztecatl, or the Tepozteco, is commemorated in Tepoztlan on September 8, the day of the *fiesta* of Mary's nativity. Celebrations honoring Mary take place in the church; those for the Tepozteco occur at his hilltop temple and in the village *plaza* (Lewis 1951: 461).

The figure of Tepoztecatl comprises Ometochtli, a pre-Hispanic pulque deity, and Tepoztecatl, the ruler of Tepoztlan at the time of the Conquest. According to one legend, this leader soon lost his faith in the old religion and went to Tenochtitlan where he was baptized. Later, he was called Natividad because he returned to Tepoztlan on the eighth of September. His subkings in other towns wanted him to support the old religion and threatened to fight, but Tepozteco, according to the story, convinced them of the truth of Christianity (Lewis 1951: 255).

In the festival, men defend the Tepozteco's temple against other men representing the seven towns of the valley; in the afternoon the Tepozteco representative and his men, wearing «red-and-yellow tunics and feathered headdresses», climb a tower in the *plaza*. They «beat drums and the *teponaztli*» (a slotted-log drum). Seven men on *burros* attack the tower but are driven off with bows and arrows. The Tepozteco talks with his enemies in Nahuatl (Redfield 1930:123). The enemies claim they will reduce Tepoztecatl to dirt and dust. He, in turn, praises the four mountains and seven hills of Tepoztlan, the Virgin Mary, and the Trinity. He refers to Mary as his "mother" and, among other things, reminds his subjects that he took the *teponaztli* from them and that, in ancient times, they played the

teponazles and drums without any sense of shame (Robelo 1951).

The literature contains several transcriptions of the legend of Tepoztecatl. The following version was told by Doña Luz of Milpa Alta:

«There was once a maiden who lived in Tepoztlan. She went every day to the river to wash clothes and she ate there...

No one really knew what was happening down there, at the river-side, but the young woman kept seeing a little bird which flew around her. No one knew that there was a cave there, inhabited by winds.

Eventually, the girl was known to be pregnant...

[A]nd when the baby was born he was much loved. The Tepoztecatl grew up and became a young man.

One day he came to visit the city of Mexico. With his great strength, he managed to lift the bells of the Cathedral into their places.

When he came here, he was carrying with him a crate containing two doves. But on his way back to Tepoztlan by the mountain, the youth stopped to rest. Because he was tired, he lay down to sleep a while.

Perhaps he had not closed the crate well, because the doves got out.

One went off to sit upon the church of Tepoztlan and the other upon the hill which is the home of Tepoztecatl.

Later the young man learned that his mother was going to be married. When she was ready to enter the church, a frightful wind began to blow. And the young Tepoztecatl went up and spoke to the priest. "Don't marry them because the woman is the mother of a son of mine" [emphasis added]. But the priest refused to believe him. He married them, and everyone went off to the woman's home, to the wedding feast. And the young man was invited to the feast. When they were about to eat, the Tepoztecatl approached the woman and said, "Why did you marry? Our son has grown up now, and we would have spent our lives together with him" [emphasis added].

The woman did not answer. Then a furious wind began to blow. And this whirlwind carried them off to the top of the mountain

where, as we know, the Tepoztecatl dwells today» (Horcasitas 1972: 15-19).

In transcriptions of the legend published by González Casanova (1928), a virgin bathes near a cave at a place called "Whirlpool". She becomes pregnant by a small bird or Air. In the first version, the mother tries to get rid of the child. Women friends place the infant on an anthill and in a *maguery*, but the ants and the *maguery* feed him. A man leaves him in a *barranca*, but rain fails to arrive and an old man and woman discover the baby. They take him home, and give thanks to God and to the Mother of the Community (i.e., the Virgin).

As the child grows older, he asks for sandals so he can roam the fields, streets, and hills. After receiving bow and arrow, he feeds his foster parents by shooting game animals out of the sky. Later, he offers himself to the people-eating monster Xochicalcatl in Xochicalco as a substitute for his grandfather. He lets the monster eat him, but cuts his way out of the monster's stomach. Returning to Tepoztlan, he passes through Cuernavaca, where he becomes angry when the people, seeing that he is not well dressed, do not invite him to their *fiesta*. He creates confusion with a dusty whirlwind, steals their *teponaztli*, and flees to the hill of Ehecatepec near Tepoztlan. After his pursuers give up trying to reach him and leave, he shows the *teponaztli* to his grandparents. In the first version he and his grandparents go to Tlalnepantla, where they ask God for forgiveness and offer the drum as a gift. In the second, Tepoztecatl defeats Tlalnepantla, Tlayacapan, and other towns.

González Casanova's third version more closely resembles the one told by Doña Luz. Tepoztecatl places the bell in the cathedral in Mexico with a whirlwind. In gratitude, the president of the country gives Tepoztecatl three boxes: one contains shovels and pickaxes; another, ropes and cords for carrying burdens; and a third, three doves. The Tepozteicans open the boxes, and the doves fly away to other towns. Tepoztecatl chastises them, saying that they will be condemned to poverty and to working for their food. Tepoztecatl complains that no one pays any attention to him and goes to live in his mountain home apart from the people.

Interpretation

Several passages in the legend tend to identify Tepoztecatl with Jesus. Tepoztecatl makes food appear miraculously. He says his mission is to redeem the people from Xochicalcatl, and he undergoes a symbolic death and resurrection as he enters the monster and then escapes from his belly. Tepoztecatl's mother becomes pregnant in a manner resembling Jesus' procreation by the Holy Ghost; just as the Holy Ghost is often represented as a dove, Air visits Tepoztecatl's mother as a bird. The impersonator of Tepoztecatl and Tepoztecans in general affirm that Tepoztecatl is the son of the Virgin Mary (Lewis 1951: 256). Tepoztecatl's foster parents seem to regard him as a child of God and the Virgin. Tepoztecatl's claim to the priest that he has fathered a child by his own mother resembles the Christian Trinity in which the Godhead is at once Father and Son. His carrying the bride or mother away to his mountain abode conforms to the imagery of Jesus going to his wedding chamber on the cross at Calvary. The celebration of Tepoztecatl on the day of Mary's birth further suggests an affinity between Tepoztecatl and Mary.

In European Christianity, Christ is associated with the East and the rising sun. Similarly, in many parts of Mesoamerica, he is identified with the sun. He also shares traits with Xipe Totec, the red Tezcatlipoca, a principal god of the eastern quarter (5). Accordingly, there are traces of a connection between Tepoztecatl and Xipe Totec. The ritual combat in the *fiesta* of the Tepozteco resembles the mock combat in the feast of Tlaxcaxipehualiztli, the pre-Hispanic festival honoring Xipe Totec. Red and yellow, the colors worn by the Tepozteco's men, were prominent colors in representations of Xipe Totec (Durán 1967: 96). As Ometochtli, moreover, the pre-Hispanic Tepoztecatl was portrayed wearing a flayed skin like Xipe Totec (*ibidem*: plate 32).

Tepoztecatl's identification with Christ is not without ambiguity, however. Tepoztecans appear to regard Tepoztecatl and Christ as separate figures (Lewis 1951:276), and they say that during the conversion of Tepoztlan to Christianity, Fray Domingo put the supernatural Tepoztecatl to a test by throwing

his image off the cliff. When the figure broke into pieces, the natives conceded its lack of power. Instead of trying to put the pieces back together, they incorporated them into the foundations of their church (Redfield 1930: 28; Lewis 1951: 256-257).

While the celebration of Tepoztecatl on September 8 may express his affinity with Mary, it may at the same time stress the difference between him and Mary: the Virgin is celebrated "in" the church, Tepoztecatl in festivities "outside" the church. It is not unusual in Mexican folk Catholicism for profane figures to appear in *fiestas* for the saints in this way. In the traditional culture of Tlayacapan, for example, old women called *Tenanches* (from the Nahuatl *tenantzin*: a mother) danced during the Christmas-Candlemas season. Some of the dances were slightly risqué, and the *Tenanches* were said to be the "grandmothers" of the infant Jesus, which suggests that they were Eve-like figures. Indeed, the presence of the *Tenanches* during the Christmas-Candlemas season was probably related to the European custom of celebrating Adam and Eve at Christmas time (see Weiser 1958:59).

Tepoztecatl's affinities with the pre-Hispanic Quetzalcoatl (see González Casanova 1928: 24; Jiménez Moreno 1941: 80) may be pertinent here. Tepoztecatl, like Quetzalcoatl, is a wind god. He is said to be the son of Wind and, as a youngster, he preferred to wander in the fields, streets, and hills, like the wind. Tepoztecatl was a god of *pulque*. The figure of Quetzalcoatl resembled some of the *pulque* gods and, in a well-known tale, Quetzalcoatl is humiliated when his enemies trick him into drunkenness. The connection between Tepoztecatl and Quetzalcoatl is evident, too, in the support that ants, the *magüey*, and rain give the infant Tepoztecatl. In pre-Hispanic myth, a black ant helps Quetzalcoatl to discover maize (Leyenda de los Soles 1975: 121). In northern Morelos, the *yeyecame* (winds) or *los aires* (airs) live in anthills near *barrancas*. Tepoztecatl is said to cause *aire* illness (Lewis 1951: 276). *Pulque* is made from the juice of the *magüey*, and Quetzalcoatl as we have seen had a close relationship with the gods of *pulque*. Quetzalcoatl also had a close relationship with the *tlaloque*, or rain gods; he swept the roads clear for them (Torquemada 1969, II: 52). In present-day Tepoztlan, the Tepozteco is a rain deity. On one occasion he appeared as a common peasant, explaining that he had caused a

drought because the villagers had not clothed his mother, the Virgin of the Nativity (Lewis 1951:260).

Now, Quetzalcoatl and his foster mother Cihuacoatl parallel Adam and Eve. Quetzalcoatl engendered the commoners with Cihuacoatl. After retrieving bones of the dead from Micltan, Quetzalcoatl gave them to Cihuacoatl, who ground them up in Tamoanchan. He then sprinkled blood from his penis on the bone meal to generate the commoners (Leyenda de los Soles 1975:121, 124). Thus Cihuacoatl and Quetzalcoatl were patrons of childbirth (Sahagún 1956, II:189-192). The incestuous nuances in the relationship between Cihuacoatl and Quetzalcoatl, moreover, remind us of a similar suggestion of incest in the relation between Eve and Adam (6).

It may be significant that Tepoztecatl's mother is called Tonantzin (Our Mother) as well as Natividad. Tonantzin was another name for Cihuacoatl (Sahagún 1956, I:46). To be certain, this similarity is not conclusive. Used in a metaphorical sense, *tonantzin* is an appropriate designation for the Virgin. Admittedly, also, Tepoztecats do not explicitly identify Tepoztecatl with Adam. There are, nonetheless, suggestions in the legends that Tepoztecatl plays an Adam-like role for the Tepoztecats. Recall that it was Tepoztecatl's men who let the three doves escape, thus condemning Tepoztlan to rural poverty and its villagers to laboring like Adam for their food. It is also noteworthy that legend refers to Tepoztecatl as «our grandfather» (González Casanova 1928: 53) (7).

Tepoztecatl's act of taking the *teponaztli* from Cuernavaca, moreover, can be read as a reference to primordial sin. In the festival, Tepoztecatl, siding with Christianity, accuses his vassals of playing their *teponazles* and drums "without shame" in ancient times. The *teponaztli* was affiliated with the god of dance in the pre-Hispanic Morelos area (Durán 1967:189) and the jaguar god of the cave in Chiapas (Seler 1963: 175-176). As noted earlier, the jaguar was associated with the underworld aspect of Tlaloc and the night sun in pre-Hispanic religion. Perhaps the sound of the drum reminded ancient Mexicans of thunder. The *teponaztli* and drums may have been associated with world trees. Durán (1967: 173) says that *ahuehuatl* literally means «drum of the water». The underworld Tlaloc, like the black Tezcatlipoca, tended to become associated with the Devil

after the Conquest (see Ingham 1986: 109-110, 112-116). Similarly, drums and the *ahuehuete* may have acquired associations with the tree in Eden.

Yet, just as the tree in Eden became the tree of the cross, the *teponaztli* took on positive meaning after conversion and Christianization. In the legend, Tepoztecatl pilfers the *teponaztli* from his subjects, thereby interfering with their ability to perform pagan rituals, but no doubt it is understood that the Tepozteicans played the drum in ancient times. Playing it was shameful, which may explain why Tepoztecatl's foster parents ask for forgiveness when they offer the *teponaztli* at the temple in Tlalnepantla, an act that parallels the placing of bells in the cathedral in other tellings of the legend. The giving of the *teponaztli* presumably transformed its moral significance, permitting its use in *fiestas* for the saints (Redfield 1930:117, 121, 123).

Summary and conclusion

Chalma recreates the biblical scenes of Eden and Golgotha, as well as traces of Tamoanchan and Tlalocan, their pre-Hispanic counterparts. The cave/*barranca* where Tepoztecatl's mother is mysteriously impregnated, the place where the infant Tepoztecatl is discovered by the old man and woman, and the Tlalocan-like hill of Tepoztecatl seem to cohere with these mysterious places.

Eden and Golgotha overlap somewhat at Chalma. The *ahuehuete* tree has attributes of Mary-Chalchiuhtlicue and Eve-Cihuacoatl. Crosses at Chalma appear in both caves and on hill-tops, reminding us respectively of the earth lord Tlaloc and the Tlaloc of woods and rain. The image of Saint Mary of Egypt alludes to pre-Christian sensuality and Christian asceticism. Similar ambiguities appear in the Tepoztecatl complex. Tepoztecatl resembles Adam in some particulars and Christ in others. The *teponaztli* has negative or positive connotations depending on historical context. The two ritual complexes, in short, portray and conflate the profane/natural and the sacred/spiritual.

These tendencies in ritual may have practical motivation. The security of peasants depends on the fertility of plants and

animals as well as human procreation. It requires, moreover, natural strength for work and the defense of family and community. Ritual, therefore, invokes or sanctifies nature to counter-balance the emphasis on spirituality in the sacraments and *fiestas*. At a deeper psychological level, the portrayal and conflation of the natural and the spiritual may express compromises between suppressed wishes and fantasies on the one hand and moral and social proclivities on the other; legend and ritual acknowledge libidinal impulses, including those of an oedipal nature, but they also show how they can be channelled into socially and morally acceptable thoughts and activities. Whatever their motivation, the folk appear to be following an orthodox model. The church itself recognizes the similarities between Eden and Golgotha and, through its sacraments and blessings, it seeks to heal a wounded nature and to reunite it with the spiritual.

Notes

1. For psychoanalytic interpretations of original sin, see Freud (1912-13), Roheim (1940), and Reik (1957). For recent discussions of oedipal imagery in Catholicism, see Dundes (1981), Carroll (1986), and Leach (1988). Jung's interpretations of the Fall and Crucifixion in his *Symbols of transformation* (1956) are also suggestive, particularly in their treatments of the symbolism of trees and the cross.
2. For a discussion of this and other instances of nuptial symbolism in Christianity, see Abrams (1971).
3. In Milpa Alta it is said that a group of rain spirits resides in a hill called "San Miguel" (Madsen 1960:131).
4. In sixteenth-century Spain, Mary and the Cross of May were thought to have the power to make rain (Christian 1981:46, 47).
5. On Xipe's association with the East, see Carrasco (1979).
6. Díaz Infante (1963) interpreted Quetzalcoatl as an oedipal figure in his *Quetzalcoatl (Ensayo psicoanalítico del mito nahua)*.
7. The Tepozteco's relation with the pre-Conquest *pulque* deity may account in part for his relation with the Virgin. As López Austin has reminded me (personal communication), *pulque* is likened to the «milk of the Virgin» in central Mexican communities. Mayahuel, the goddess of the *maguey*, was apparently affiliated with the water goddesses of Tlalocan (Sahagún 1956, I:200-201). Yet *pulque* was also associated with the moon and the Eve-like earth goddesses Cihuacoatl and Tlazolteotl.

(Klein 1980:165; Seler 1963:82, 110); presumably, these latter associations figure in Tepoztecatl's Adam-like qualities.

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Summary

The *mestizo* cultures of rural central Mexico evince many traces of pre-Hispanic belief and practice, but they are ordered by an essentially Christian opposition between natural and spiritual reproduction. This observation, elaborated earlier in a study of Tlayacapan, Morelos, is further illustrated here with the legend of Tepoztecatl and the pilgrimage sanctuary of Chalma.

A review of Christian symbolism and analysis of the Tepoztecatl and Chalma materials suggest that the pre-Hispanic mythical scenes of Tamoanchan and Tlalocan were assimilated to the biblical scenes of Eden and Golgotha. Attention is given to the themes of sin and redemption and to the symbolism of caves, water, trees, and crosses.

Sommario

Dalle culture *mestizas* del Messico centrale rurale si evincono numerose tracce di credenze e pratiche pre-ispaniche che non si pongono comunque in contraddizione con la struttura essenzialmente cattolica di tali configurazioni locali.

Per l'A., infatti, il processo sincretico prodottosi nel Messico centrale è fondamentalmente e logicamente cattolico, anche se il grado di ortodossia risulta contestualmente variabile.

Gli elementi di origine precolombiana presenti nel complesso religioso osservato sembrano quindi ordinati rispetto alle coordinate ideologiche del pensiero cattolico, con particolare riferimento alla contrapposizione cristiana fra procreazione naturale e procreazione spirituale. Questa osservazione, elaborata precedentemente in uno studio su Tlayacapan, Morelos, è ulteriormente avvalorata in questo contesto dall'analisi della

legghenda e della *fiesta* di Tepoztecatl, divinità pre-ispànica patrona di Tepozteco (Morelos settentrionale), e del Santuario di Chalma, uno fra i più popolari luoghi di pellegrinaggio in Messico.

Una disamina del simbolismo cristiano e l'analisi dei dati relativi a Tepoztecatl e a Chalma suggeriscono che gli scenari mitici precolombiani di Tamoanchan e del Tlalocan sono assimilati ai luoghi biblici dell'Eden e del Golgota. Viene inoltre posta attenzione all'emergenza dei concetti cristiani di "colpa" e "redenzione" all'interno delle forme culturali e rituali presenti sia nel pellegrinaggio a Chalma sia nella *fiesta* in onore di Tepoztecatl, e al simbolismo relativo alle grotte, all'acqua, agli alberi e alle croci. In particolare, si sottolinea la presenza nella cultura folk messicana dell'associazione dell'immagine della Vergine con la croce e l'assimilazione dell'antico culto ai *graniceros* con la devozione alla figura di S. Michele Arcangelo.